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UH med school down to last hurdle after Legislature approves funding

By Todd Ackerman

The University of Houston is down to the last major hurdle standing in the way of the city's first new medical school in nearly half a century after the Legislature approved funding for it Sunday.

The Texas Legislature's inclusion of \$20 million in the budget for startup costs for the school — \$10 million in 2020 and \$10 million in 2021 — leaves accreditation as the only milestone still UH needs to attain. The funding follows a bill passed in April that recognizes a UH medical college in state statute, another important step.

“Those legislative actions are very important,” said Dr. Stephen Spann, the planned college's founding dean. “Being recognized in state statute justified the request for startup funding, which was essential to hire faculty and staff and develop a curriculum. We're very grateful.”

Such hiring and curriculum building are necessary to gain accreditation from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, said Spann. UH submitted its application in March and is now waiting on the agency to schedule a site visit, likely this fall. The entire process typically takes nearly a year.

UH is hoping to begin enrolling medical students in fall 2020. Plans call for the school to focus on primary care in underserved areas, a huge need in Houston and the state, given projected doctor shortfalls.

Plans also call for the school to be built on campus, a location pivotal to the role it plans to serve in the Third Ward, where Spann compares the health disparities “to those of Third World countries.” To that end, [a safety-net health clinic](#) for low-income people opened on campus April 1.

The medical school will be built on a 43-acre tract of undeveloped property just southeast of the campus proper.

UH will ask for a total of \$20 million more in subsequent sessions of the Legislature — \$5 million in each of 2021, 2023, 2025 and 2027. Spann said special startup funding is needed because it will take time for the school's revenue streams to cover costs.

When the school is fully up and running, the revenue streams will be state formula funding (based on enrollment), tuition, philanthropy and research grants and clinical activity. Formula funding will account for about 55 percent of the pie, said Spann.

The creation of a UH medical school is [a longtime dream](#) for the public institution. Regents finally committed to the idea in November 2017, establishing a College of Medicine and authorizing staff to apply for Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approval and for LCME accreditation. Coordinating board approval, granted in October 2018, was the first major hurdle UH surmounted.

The other medical schools in the city are Baylor College of Medicine, which opened in the Texas Medical Center in 1943; and McGovern Medical School at UTHealth, which opened in 1972.

UH's pursuit of a medical school is one of two in the area. [Sam Houston State University](#) hopes to create a college of osteopathic medicine in Conroe.

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/UH-med-school-down-to-last-hurdle-after-13902306.php>